

54

T H E
Perस्पicuity and Solidity
O F T H O S E
E V I D E N C E S
O F
C H R I S T I A N I T Y,

T O W H I C H T H E
Generality of its Professors among us
may attain,

ILLUSTRATED and VINDICATED ;

In a LETTER to the AUTHOR of a late
Pamphlet, intituled, *Christianity not founded
on Argument, &c.*

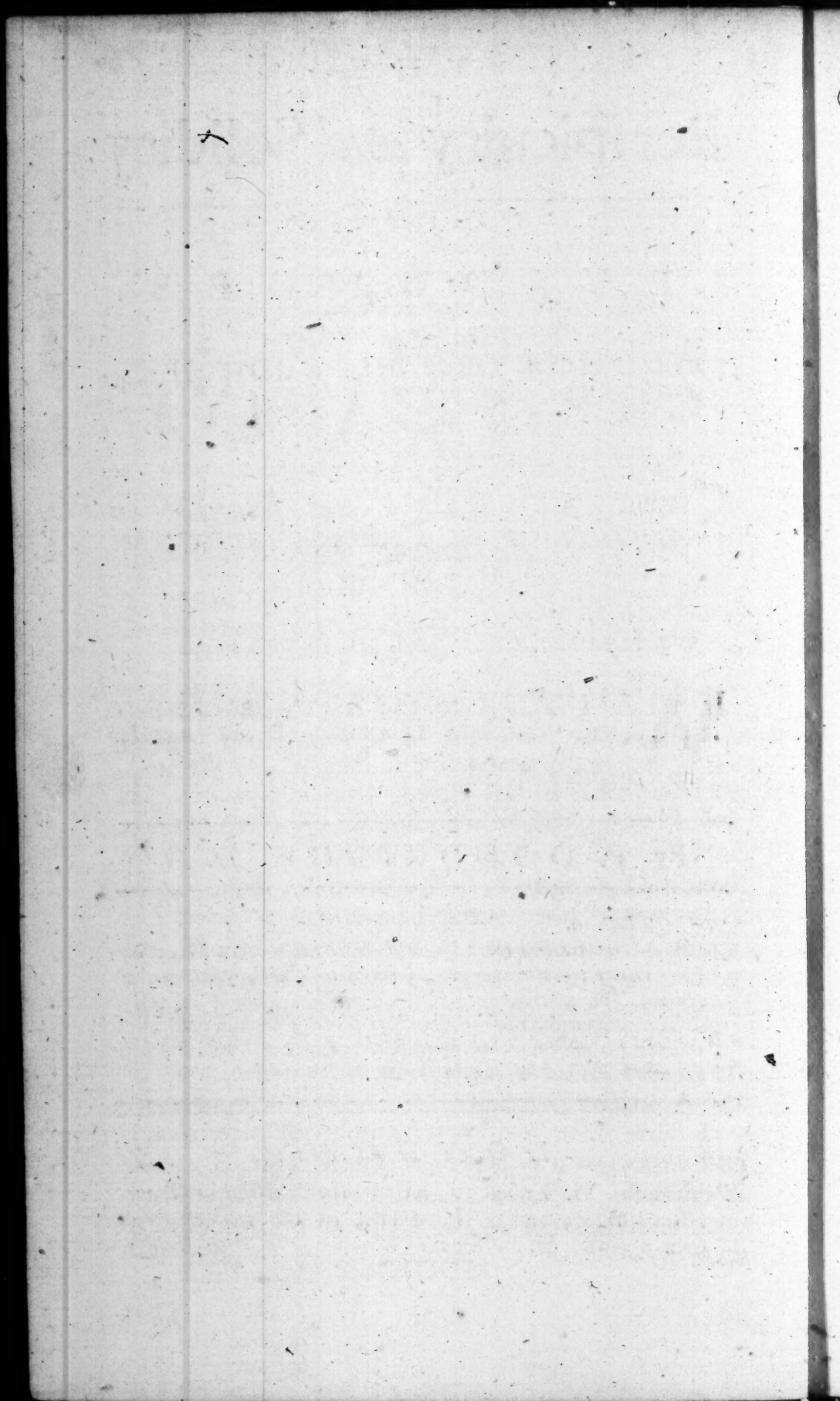
By P. DODDRIDGE, D. D.

*WE also believe, and therefore speak. 2 Cor. iv. 13.
An High-way shall be there ;—it shall be called THE WAY OF
HOLINESS ;—the way-faring Men, tho' Fools, shall not err
therein. Isa. xxxv. 8.*

*Quis non contemplatione—concutitur ad requirendum quid intus
in re sit ? Quis non, ubi requisivit, accedit ? ubi accessit, pati
exoptat ? Tertull. Apolog. cap. ult.*

L O N D O N :

Printed for M. FENNER, at the *Turk's Head* in *Grace-
church-street* ; and J. HODGES, at the *Looking-Glass*
over-against *St. Magnus Church, London-Bridge.*
MDCCXLII.



TO THE
 AUTHOR of a late Pamphlet,
 INTITLED,
 CHRISTIANITY *not founded on*
Argument, &c.

S I R,

WHEN I consider the Strain and Purport of your late Discourse, I am heartily sorry that I was so long a Stranger to it. A Month has hardly passed, since it first fell into my Hands. They who know my Circumstances in Life, and the Variety of Business in which I am continually engaged, will not wonder that I missed it so long. Nor should I have read it now, had it not been mentioned to me by some Friends, for whose Judgment I have a very high Regard, as a Performance which had a very ill Aspect on *Christianity*, and which was executed with much more Spirit and Address, than is to be found in most of the Attacks which have been lately made upon it.

I have now Sir, perused it with Attention; and various as my Cares and Labours are, I think it of such Importance, that I ought to lay before you, and the World, the Result of my Reflections upon it.

4 *Christianity represented as unreasonable,*

The Character you have assumed of most zealous *Advocate for Christianity*, seems so ill to agree with the Purport of your Reasonings, that I apprehend most of our Readers will esteem it a bad Compliment paid to your Understanding, if I were to think of that Character otherwise than as a *Mask* worn for Plesantry, rather than Disguise. Yet after all, Sir, it is the Tendency, rather than the Design, of your Pamphlet, with which I am concerned. Were you indeed the warm *Christian* you personate, I could not behold *the Wounds* of Religion with Indifference, merely because they were *received in the House of a Friend*: Nor would I consent to demolish the Walls of a Fortress, on the Strength of which my Life, and even the Safety of my Country, depended, tho' the worthiest Man upon Earth should, in a Fit of Lunacy, undertake to persuade me, that it was the most effectual Method to engage the Miraculous Protection of an Almighty Arm. That those Efforts, which, *in the Name of the Lord*, you have thought fit to make, with such solemn Preparation, and such glowing Ardor of Spirit, do indeed tend to subvert the *Faith of Christians*, and to expose the *Gospel* to the last Degree of Contempt, is so exceeding plain, that I verily believe, it would appear to every intelligent Reader a solemn Kind of Trifling, to labour the Proof of it: And the Passages, which I am to take under Examination, may be more than sufficient to demonstrate it to a Stranger.

You have evidently represented *Christianity*, if not *Religion* in general, as an *unreasonable Thing*; for you expressly tell us, not only "that it is not founded
" on Argument," and that it is incapable of being generally proved by it; but go so far as roundly to say, (*pag. 86.*) "that there is an irreconcilable
" Repugnance between Reason and Faith." You speak of *Scripture*, as if all your Eloquence was at
a Loss

Scripture useless, and Miracles uncertain. 5

a Loss for Words strong enough to express your Contempt for it. “ *Manuscript Authorities and Pa-* “ *per-Revelations*,” as they are insultingly called, are, it seems, “ an empty Notion :” (*Pag.* 60) — “ The “ suspicious Repositories of Human Testimony, “ in which nothing remains that can deserve our “ least Notice, or be thought of Consequence “ enough to engage a Moment’s Attention.” (*Pag.* 59.) It was not, it seems, enough to represent them as superfluous, “ We have no longer Need of distant “ Records :” (*ibid.*) But you briskly maintain, that Omnipotence itself is not able to supply their Defects and Insufficiency ; “ tho’ a constant Miracle “ were to interpose on the Occasion, and the same “ Almighty Power that first indited it,” what ever you mean by that singular Expression, “ were “ to continue hovering perpetually with a guardi- “ an Hand over the sacred Depositum.” (*Pag.* 61.)

As for all the *Scripture-Miracles*, on which we have laid so great a Stress, you declare without Reserve, “ that they are to us no more than an un- “ certain Hearsay,” and “ that the Voice of God, “ bearing Witness to his beloved Son, has long “ since dwindled to Human Tradition.” (*Pag.* 52, 53.) Nay, you strongly insinuate, that these *Miracles* were never meant as Arguments of the Divine Authority of the *Gospel* ; (*pag.* 46.) and, with very little Complaisance to *St. Paul*, are pleased to tell us, by a Burlesque on his Words, when speaking of the *Resurrection of Christ*, (*pag.* 68.) “ that *the Thing was done in a Corner*,” without taking the least Notice of the publick Proofs which were given of it, in the very Place where it had happened but a few Days before.

It is obvious, Sir, that I might transcribe many Pages of your Work in Illustration of these Hints ; and I must needs say, that the Language appears so unnatural, and so monstrous, in a professed *Disciple*

6 *The Agency of the Spirit misrepresented.*

ciple of Christ, that I am sometimes ready to wonder, you were not a little more careful to save Appearances. But then I recollect, that the Character you assume is such, as leaves little Room to expect Consistency, and seems best supported by such Kind of Paradoxes and Self Contradictions. By this means also you have artfully enough disarmed your Adversary of the Weapon called *Argumentum ad Hominem*, a whole Magazine of which might otherwise have presented. Were you to be attacked that Way, you would no doubt laugh very heartily, to see an Adversary so fairly bit, in a grave Expectation that you should be solicitous *cum Ratione insanire*, to appear a cool-headed, consistent Enthusiast.

You have chosen, Sir, in these Transports, whether real or fictitious, to fight with a two-edged Weapon; and the Blow which you give by a Kind of back Stroke, while avowedly defending *Christianity*, seems to me as threatening as any of the rest. I mean, those Passages of your Book, in which you so grossly misrepresent that glorious and important Doctrine of the *New Testament*, concerning the *Agency of the Divine Spirit*, in promoting the Reception and Efficacy of the *Gospel*. This, according to you, is nothing less than such an immediate and instantaneous Communication of the whole Sum and System of the *Gospel*, as renders every particular Believer more *Infallible*, than the *Church of Rome* has generally asserted the *Pope* to be, and secures the most illiterate Person, even from a Possibility of Error. (Pag. 89, 90.) This plenary *Inspiration* communicated to every *private Christian*, you represent as the main and only Support of Religion; tho' I think, Sir, you must needs know, that every Difference of Opinion in the *Christian Church* is a Demonstration, that no such universal Influences do in Fact take Place. So that upon the whole, you have

have left *Christianity* no Evidence but what every one sees it has not, that is indeed you have left it *no Evidence at all*. In one word, if your Reader were to suppose you serious in what you write, and to fall in with your Reasoning, I think the plain Consequence must be, that all Men of sober Sense would immediately reject the *Gospel*, while among the Remainder, *every one* that was *mad* would *make himself a Prophet*, and vent every wild Chimera of his distempered Brain as an immediate Dictate of God himself; in the Plenitude of Inspiration and Distraction, equally scorning to condescend, to assign any Reasons for his Doctrines, or to hear any Arguments against them.

That your late Performance, sprightly and ingenious as it is, has a Tendency to produce these terrible Effects, (for to me they appear *terrible* beyond Expression,) is too evident; and I may afterwards give you a more particular Account of the Reasons, on which I apprehend, that it must in its Consequences affect the Foundations of *Natural Religion*, as well as of *Revealed*. How far any of these Consequences might be intended by you, it is not my Business to determine. You, Sir, are ere long to answer that to the great Judge of Hearts, whose Tribunal I should dread to usurp. Yet I cannot forbear observing, that the *ludicrous Turn* you so often give to *Scripture*, and the Air of *Burlesque* and *Irony* which runs thro' your whole Piece, neither suits the Character of a rapturous *Devotee* so often affected, nor discovers a becoming Sense of the infinite Moment of the Question in Debate. Pardon me, Sir, the Plainness with which I speak my real Apprehensions on this Head, and believe me when I seriously declare, it is with no Design to libel and expose you, but with a sincere Desire to serve you and others, into whose Hand this Letter may come, that I now set my self to examine

8 *Manner of treating the Subject.*

mine what you have advanced, and, if possible, to lead you into juster and safer Sentiments.

Agreeably to these Views, and that Regard to the general Good which has engaged me to enter on this Controversy, I shall decline the invidious and unnecessary Task of pursuing you, with severe Criticism, thro' every Paragraph. I am not solicitous to expose every unguarded Expression, to canvass every minute Mistake, nor even to rescue every Clause of the Sacred Writings which I apprehend you have misrepresented or misapplied. I have not Leisure for such a Task as this, and there is hardly any Thing against which my Temper more strongly recoils. I shall examine what I apprehend most material, and most dangerous in your Work, with Calmness and Seriousness; representing, in as few Words as I can, what I take to be the Strength of your Cause, and telling you with the Simplicity and Moderation that becomes a *Christian*, how I answer it to my own Conscience. This I shall do with all possible Plainness, not affecting to be witty in a Case in which Eternity is concerned; nor so consulting your Taste and Character, as to forget that I am addressing the Publick, and aiming not to divert, but if possible, to edify. And if any cannot relish such a Design, and such a Manner, I give them fair Warning to throw this Letter aside, and to waste, (or shall I rather say, *to kill*,) no more of their *precious Moments* about it.

It sufficiently appears, Sir, from your Manner of writing, that you are well aware, the Main Strength of your Cause lies in the *First Head* of your Discourse, to which therefore, after some gay Flourishes on the *Two last*, you return again toward the Conclusion of your Pamphlet. It is *this* therefore, which I shall here examine at large;
and

and the rather, because I think what you urge on this Topick, tho' it be far from any New Discovery, may admit some farther Illustration, than I have commonly met with; and is the Point, which in Proportion to its Difficulty and Importance, has been least discussed by the worthy *Apologists for Christianity*, in which our Country is so happy. The Foundations of the Solution have indeed often been laid down; but I have long wished to see the Matter placed in that particular Point of View, in which the Difficulties you propose, and which naturally arise, may be most happily obviated.

It is your professed Design under your *First General* to shew, "That *Reason*, or the Intellectual Faculty, could not possibly, both from its own Nature, and that of Religion, be the Principle intended by God to lead us into a true Faith." (Pag. 7.) An ambiguous Proposition, the Sense of which must be ascertained in a few Words, before its pretended Demonstration can be discussed.

You well know, Sir, that the whole Body of *Christians* as such, are, and must ever be agreed, that *Reason* is not our only Guide, but that *Divine Revelation* is most wisely and graciously intended to supply its many Deficiencies; and you know too, that they generally acknowledge the Reality and Importance of *Divine Influences* on the Mind, to confirm our Faith, and to quicken our Obedience. So that if you would not encounter a Puppet of your own forming, with whom we have no Manner of Concern, you must mean by this grand Proposition, "That *Reason* is not to be consulted, in judging either of the *Evidences* or the *Sense* of any supposed *Revelation*, nor in forming any of our Religious Sentiments." An Assertion so apparently extravagant, that one would imagine, that

that merely to propound it were a sufficient Confutation.

Can any one indeed seriously think, that the Noblest of our Powers was intended only to the lowest and meanest Purposes; to serve the little Offices of mortal Life, and not to be consulted in the greatest of Concerns, those of Immortality? Strange! that the only Power which renders us capable of saying, *Where is GOD my Maker?* and of forming any Sentiments of Religion at all, should be discharged from that Province, for which it seems chiefly to have been given! But it will at least have Strength and Spirit enough to say, Why must I be thus discharged? And you condescend to answer at large, without seeming to be aware, that your first Step towards Demonstrating your Point supposes it to be false; appealing to *Reason* itself to judge, that it is not capable of judging at all. Nor is this Position only inconsistent with the Pertinency of any *Reasoning* whatsoever, but particularly inconsistent with that Footing on which you profess to place *Christianity*, when its *rational Proofs* are given up. Since, if God were, according to your strange Hypothesis, to reveal to me in a Moment the whole *System of Christianity*, and were I assured, by some inward inexplicable Sensation, that it was indeed *a Revelation from him*, I could not receive it without some *Reasoning*. I must at least have this one short *Syllogism* in my Mind, "What comes from God is to be admitted as true; but this comes from God, therefore it is to be so admitted." And the Foundation of this supposes some previous *Reasoning*, concerning the Existence, and Veracity of that Being, whose Testimony is so readily to be admitted.

A very small Part of your Sagacity, Sir, might serve to discover this, which, obvious as it is, supercedes all you have writ. I will therefore take it
for

Christianity capable of Rational Proof. 11

for granted, that what you really intend by this general, and very unguarded Proposition, is chiefly this; “ That *Christianity* is not capable of such a “ *rational* Proof, as can be made intelligible to the “ *Generality of Mankind*, so as to oblige them to receive and obey it.” This is what you seem to have at Heart throughout your whole Book, and I shall not farther press the Advantage you have given an Opponent, by asserting so much more than was necessary to your main Design.

You do indeed sometimes acknowledge, I think in direct Opposition to your main Argument, that *Christianity* is capable of being *rationally proved* to the Conviction of a *studious Person*; (however unnecessary, and however hazardous it may be, even for such a one to meddle with that Kind of Proof :) But you always contend, that the *Generality of Mankind* cannot enter into any *rational Proofs* of it, (tho’ it is well known that it was intended for them;) and that they who can, will not find them sufficient, to bear the Stress which must in Fact be laid upon them, if we desire to be *Christians* to any valuable Purpose. I shall therefore set myself on the contrary to prove, “ That the *rational Evidence of* “ *Christianity* is so adjusted, that the *Generality of its* “ *Professors* may, if they be not wanting to themselves, attain to some competent Satisfaction “ with regard to it.” And when I have offered that Proof, I shall consider your Objections.

I am far from asserting, that every one in common Life can have a full View of all the *Controversies* which relate to *Christianity*; a Curiosity of Literature, which to Multitudes would be of very small Importance: Nor do I maintain, that every sincere Believer is capable of rendering a sufficient *Reason for his Faith*; an Ability on many Accounts highly desirable, yet not, so far as I can find, at

12 *The Rational Evidence of Christianity*

all essential to Salvation. A Man may have Reasons in his own Mind, which he cannot readily put into Words. Nay, I apprehend it possible, that a Man may feel and comply with the practical Tendency of *Christianity*, who does not himself rightly apprehend the Force of its *rational Proofs*, and perhaps lays a very great Stress on *Arguments* which are far from being conclusive. And I hope, Sir, you will allow, that when a Man's Temper and Character is such as the *Gospel* requires, such a *speculative Mistake* as to the Strength of an *Argument* does not affect his *Salvation*. Else I fear, we must condemn all those excellent Persons, who have believed the great Fundamental of all Religion, *the Existence of a GOD*, chiefly on the Force of those *Cartesian Arguments*, now generally, and I think rationally, exploded.

The Question is not, what Knowledge is universally necessary, nor what is in Fact attained; but what Satisfaction might generally be had, if there were a competent Care, on the one Hand, to teach, and on the other, to learn. This is all, which is absolutely essential to my Argument. Nevertheless, for the farther Illustration of the Subject, I shall freely tell you, how I apprehend the Case to stand, with regard to the *Generality* of the *common People*, who are in good earnest in the Profession of Religion; readily acknowledging, tho' with great Grief, that there are thousands and ten thousands, who wear the *Name of Christians* as by meer Accident, without at all considering its Meaning, Reason, or Obligation; a Case very consistent with the Possibility of their being better informed, and rationally convinced.

Now here, Sir, the leading Thought will be, that God has so adjusted the Nature and Circumstance of *Christianity*, as represented and exhibited
in

in the *New Testament*, that it is attended with a strong Degree of *Internal Evidence*, of which, by an unaccountable Omission, you take not the least Notice; and that what is most essential to the *External Proof*, lies within much less Compass than you seem to imagine, and is capable, if previous Precautions be taken in a proper Manner, of being opened to Persons of an *ordinary Capacity*, and understood by them, tho' they have neither Ability nor Leisure for the Curiosities of learned Disquisition.

For the Illustration of this, you must give me Leave to remind you, that both the *Mosaick* and *Christian* Dispensations have been much *misrepresented*, in Consequence of Mens taking their Notions of them, rather from the Conduct of their Professors, than from the Institutes of their respective Founders. To apply this to the present Occasion, let us consider what the Case of *Christians* would be, with regard to the *rational Evidence* of their Religion, if Things were to flow on in the Channel, into which it was the apparent Design of our Divine Master to direct them.

You will, no doubt, Sir, readily allow, that a *pious Education*, and a *standing Ministry*, are Appointments of our blessed Redeemer, and will spare me the Trouble of proving either of them in Form. And as you take it for granted in the whole of your Letter, that *Infant Baptism* is a *Christian Ordinance*, you will also allow me to mention it as a common Principle, tho' little of my Argument will depend upon its being so.

A Parent therefore, acting upon the Laws of *Christianity*, (which is what I here all along suppose in stating the Case,) having in a solemn Manner devoted his Child to God in its early Infancy,
and

14 *Children will gain an early Sense of Piety,*

and having ever since been affectionately recommending it to the Divine Blessing, watches the first Dawning of *Reason*, to instill into its tender Mind, Sentiments of Piety to God, Gratitude to the Redeemer, Benevolence to Men, and every other Grace and Virtue which the *Gospel* recommends, and which the Life of its great Founder exemplified. Quickened by the Obligation, which the Birth and Baptism of every younger Child in the Family renews, the Father and Mother concur in a wise and conscientious Care, to keep their dear Offspring, as far as possible, out of the Sight and Hearing of every Thing profane, cruel, and indecent; and *whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are venerable, whatsoever Things are righteous, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise*, the Child will be taught, by the Force of Precept and daily Example, to *think on these Things*, and to pursue them. The Consequence of this, under those Influences of Divine Grace which may be chearfully expected in the Way of Duty, will probably be an early Sense of Decency, Virtue, and Piety. The Growth of those Seeds of *corrupt Nature*, which will in some Instances discover themselves in the most amiable Children, will in a great Measure be suppressed; *Religion* will grow familiar and pleasant, under the smiling Aspect it will appear to wear; and the *Bible*, which our little Disciple will early have been taught to read, will soon become a most delightful Book. The entertaining Stories, the fine Examples, the beautiful Poems, the wise Precepts so gravely and yet so kindly given, which it will every where meet with, must give it Abundance of Pleasure; and it will be eager to read those Things, the general Contents of which it has learnt, long before it could read, from the
daily

daily Discourse of its Parents, who while they are recounting these glorious Things, will be teaching themselves as well as their Children, and by more familiar and attentive Views of them, confirming their own Faith, and animating their own Piety. And as for the leading Facts which the Child meets with in *Scripture*, strange as some of them may appear, it will readily believe them, on this general Foundation; that its good Parents, who know much better than himself, and never deceive him, assure him that every Thing, which this excellent Book contains, is true. And this, Sir, is all the Satisfaction, which a Child of the most extraordinary Genius can have in the first Stages of Life; and if it die before it arrive to greater Maturity, it will be happy in the practical Influence, which the *Gospel*, thus *implicitly believed*, had upon its Temper and Conduct; as it could be under no Necessity of entering into its *rational Evidence*, before those Faculties opened by which that Evidence was to be received, any more than a Blind Man can be obliged to read, or the Dumb to sing God's Praises.

At length, as the Minds of Children open, they will gradually be led into some farther Reflections on the *Certainty of those Things in which they have been instructed*. And here they will soon perceive some Degree of Difference in the Evidence of them, immediately appearing. As for the *Existence of a Supreme Being*, I really think, that the noblest and most satisfactory Arguments, of which the Mind of Man is capable, are those which are obvious even to the Understanding of a Child; I mean, those taken from the Works of Creation and Providence. Common Sense will surely tell these little Creatures, as soon as they can understand the Words, that *if every House, even the poorest Cottage, must have some Builder, there must be one who built all Things;*
who

16 *They will soon know somewhat of GOD,*

who made Heaven and Earth, with all their bright, noble Furniture. And as they see, clearly as they see the Sun, that he who made, and upholds all these Things, is *powerful* and *wise*; which every Flower, and every Fly, when considered as his Work, may shew them: So they may naturally conclude, such a great and wise Being is *good*; and it will be easy to shew them, that every agreeable Object about them is a sensible Proof of his Goodness; every pleasant Fruit, for Instance, a Gift of GOD, which all the Men in the World could not have made, or provided for them, without him.

By such familiar Views of Things they may be brought, not only to *believe*, but to *know*, that there is a great, *powerful*, *wise*, and kind *Father of the World* always near them. Nor will it be difficult to give them some rational View and Conviction of his *Moral Attributes*, as inferred from his *Natural*. I suppose they have in those early Lessons of *Sacred History*, which have been their Entertainment from their Infancy, been led to reflect on the *Characters* of Persons mentioned; to see the Amiability of some Affections and Actions, and the Deformity of others, which in many Instances are as obvious, as that one Face, or Dress, makes a pleasanter Appearance to the Eye than another. Discerning this visible Difference in *moral Characters*, long before they know what the Words *Morality* or *Character* signify, they will naturally, and I think very reasonably, conclude, that it is just to ascribe every Excellence and Glory to him, in whom they see so many: And by consequence, that he must be pleased with what is *good*, and displeased with what is *evil*. They see it in their wise and pious Parents, (for *wise* and *pious* we here suppose them to be;) and they will much more conclude, it must be in him, whom they have learnt to address as *our Father who is in Heaven*. I take the Liberty,

Liberty, Sir, to tell you, that I have examined many Scores of Children on these Heads, not as to what they have learnt, but what they themselves think of the Matter; and have put the Questions in various Forms, to suggest an Affirmative or Negative Answer; and I always find, if they understand the Terms of it, they answer right upon a very short Pause.

Agreeably to these obvious Principles, they naturally apprehend, that the *Regard* of God to his *Creatures* follows them *beyond Death*; and that he rewards, or punishes them, suitably to their Temper and Behaviour. They cannot think, that God would have suffered such Persons, as *Abel*, or the *Seven Sons* of that good Woman in the *Maccabees*, to have been slain in that cruel Manner, if he had not intended to take them to himself, and make them happier than they were: That, Sir, is a learned Prejudice, the laboured Error of a *Man*, of a *Minute Philosopher*; the Simplicity of a virtuous *Child* is not able to attain it.

A prudent Parent will easily foresee, that the Child will find greater Difficulties in coming at the Evidence of the Truth of those Things, which depend merely upon the *Authority of Scripture*. He will therefore early be laying in Materials for its seeing the Force of that *noble Part of it*, which you so strangely leave untouched; I mean, that which is *Internal*, and arises from the Contents and Design of the Book itself. A Child trained up as we here suppose, will probably of itself make a great many Reflections, what an *excellent Book* it is; especially as to some Parts of it, with which I have known little Children so struck, that they have of their own Accord read the same Passage, tho' neither History nor Parable, over and over, till they have almost learnt it by Heart: The reli-

gious Parent or Friend will watch, encourage, and illustrate these Remarks. And at length, when he finds the young Mind strong enough to receive it, he will lead it to reflect, what *excellent Men* they must be who wrote such Things. And when that Reflection is familiar, and has been daily renewed, perhaps for Weeks and Months, another easily follows, — that the *Bible* is undoubtedly *true and divine*; for *good Men* would never have invented Lies, and have presumed to teach them in the Name of God himself; and *wicked Men* would not, and could not, have written what is so excellently Good, and tends to make others so. This, Sir, my pious Friends taught me when I was a Child; and I think it, to this very Day, an Argument of unanswerable Weight: And I cannot but apprehend, that the more a Man advances in real Goodness, and the more intimately he converses with *Scripture*, the more he will be impressed with it. Here is an Argument depending on no other Fact than this, that there is such a Book as the *Bible* in the World, of which our Children are as sure, as that there is a Sun: And Providence has wisely ordered it so, that they may understand the Force of it, before they can enter into Objections against it; and so far as I can judge, those Objections must be stronger than any I have ever met with, which can be sufficient to balance the Force of it. Yet this is far from being the only Foundation of our Faith, or the only Argument in its Favour, which a *young Christian* may be able, with proper Assistance, to understand.

The *External Evidence* does not indeed lie within so little Room, nor can it perhaps be made equally obvious by every pious Parent; yet with the Assistance which able *Ministers*, and proper *Books* may give, I apprehend a Child of fourteen or fifteen

teen

teen Years old may have some competent View of it. It will be a most easy Thing to shew him, by uncontroverted antient Testimonies, collected by a Variety of Writers,—that *Christianity* was an antient Religion,—for the Sake of which its Professors, in its earliest Ages, endured great Exiremities;—that there was, about 1700 Years ago, such a Person as *Jesus Christ*, the great Founder of it;—that the first Preachers of his Religion wrote *Books*, which were called by the Name of those that make up the most important Part of the *New Testament*;—that these *Books* are in the Main transmitted to us *uncorrupted*;—and that our *Translation* of them may in the general be depended upon as *right*. These are the grand Preliminaries; and as the Foundation may be laid without much Difficulty, so the Superstructure may be raised upon it, with yet much more Ease. From the *New Testament* thus proved to be *genuine*, a Person of very moderate Capacity and Learning will presently be able to shew, that the *Writers of it* certainly *knew*, whether the Facts they recorded were true or false;—that their *Character*, so far as we can judge by their Manner of Writing, was so excellently *good*, that there is no Reason to suspect them of Falschhood;—nay, that the Probability of *their Fidelity* is so great, that it would be astonishing, if the strongest Temptation could prevail upon them to violate it;—at least in so criminal a Manner, as they must have done, if they were *Impostors*:—The *Temptations* must have been *exceeding strong*, to justify the least Degree of Suspicion:—But they had *no Temptation* at all to forge such a Story, and to attempt to impose upon the World by it:—However, that if they had made the Attempt, they *could not have succeeded* in gaining Credit;—nevertheless it is plain, they *did gain Credit* among vast Multitudes, who were strongly prejudiced against

C 2

the

20 *They will hence see Christianity is true,*

the Religion they taught:—From all which Things compared, it appears, that their Story, and the Religion founded upon it, i. e. *Christianity*, is true: A Conclusion, which may be greatly illustrated by shewing them farther,—what wonderful Things have since happened for the *Confirmation of it*; considering on the one Hand, what God has done to establish it, and on the other, what Methods its Enemies have taken to destroy it.

It is not my Business, Sir, to state and vindicate these Arguments at large. I have done it already in my *Three Sermons on the Evidences of Christianity*, which were published several Years ago; and I shall be very ready to canvass the Strength of them, as there represented, with any who shall think fit to bring them into Dispute. I rather mention *those Sermons* here, because they are calculated for popular Use, and may assist those who are not so well versed in the Arguments, to propose them to their *Children*, or *Catechumens*, in what I apprehend the easiest and plainest Light. By talking over these Heads in a free and familiar Manner, and then giving the young Person the Book to read two or three Times alone, till he has fixed the leading Thoughts in his Understanding and Memory, I doubt not but such a Foundation might be laid in a few Days, as all the succeeding Years of Life would not be able to shake. Nor must it ever be forgotten, how much it would be cemented and established, by that true Taste of *moral Beauty and Excellence*, which we suppose already formed in the Mind of our young Student. He would find so much to charm him in the Sentiments; Character, and Conduct of the *Apostles*, as would engage him to lay a very great Stress on that important Branch of the Argument, which turns on that Point. It would appear to him, *in Theory*, utterly *improbable*, that Men of their heroick *Goodness* should engage
in

in so impious, and mischievous a *Fraud*, as they must have engaged in, if their Testimony was false; * as on the other Hand, the *Good Sense* which may easily be discovered in their Writings and Behaviour, will make it appear equally *absurd* to imagine, they should so madly run on *Sufferings* and *Ruin*, as they must have done, if they had not been conscious of a Divine Support, of miraculous Powers, and of immense future Rewards.

A Religious Youth, grown up to Years of Maturity, with a Mind thus furnished, and thus disposed, will not easily be perverted to *Infidelity*. So precious a Freight would be too weighty, to be overset by every *Wind of Doctrine*, or every Breath of *Ridicule*. Yet it might conduce farther to his Security, if a prudent *Parent* or *Minister* should give him, before the Scene of Temptation opens, some short *Hints* of the chief Topicks from whence *Objections* against *Christianity* are drawn, and of the *plainest* and most obvious *Answers* to them, which so far as I can judge are generally the most solid. If a Person be not intended for some learned Profession, or distinguished Circumstance in Life, it is by no Means necessary to be large in this Part of the Scheme; but something of this Kind may easily and profitably be done, and there will be no Reason to be in any Panick, lest every Hint of an Objection should *overturn his Faith*. Answers will be suggested, with those Objections; and he will soon be weary of hearing such poor unsatisfactory Things, as most of the Cavils of *Infidelity* are. And here again, the *good Habits*, and *Dispositions*

* How impious and mischievous the Fraud must have been, if it were a *Fraud*, is illustrated more fully than I have else where seen it, in the *Sermons* I mentioned above; (See *pag.* 259. & *seq.* 2d. Edit.) and the Thought appears to me of vast Importance.

22 *Such will be able to answer Objections,*

sitions formed in his Mind, will be of great Service. He will perceive, that *Christianity* wears so favourable an Aspect, and opens upon him so fine a Prospect, that he will not *bunt after Objections* against it; as a Man is not studious to find a Flaw in Writings, by which he stands intitled to the Reversion of some noble Estate: And when they accidentally start up in his Way, he will soon see, that *many of them* are grounded on notorious Falseness, and are in themselves despicably mean; especially when set against the great Arguments for it, of which he is already possessed: And with Regard to *others*, the Assistance of *Ministers* and other religious Friends, which when pressed with real Difficulties he will honestly seek, will no doubt furnish him with proper Answers; and indeed his *Converse with the Scriptures* will enable him, without foreign Assistance, to obviate most of them, and they will vanish like Birds of Night before the rising Sun: Not now to mention those Auxiliaries, which his Faith will often call in, from observing and comparing the *different Characters* of those, who are most solicitous, on the one Hand to destroy it, and on the other to support it, of which I may hereafter speak.

If this, Sir, were merely an imaginary Scheme, on which no Parent acted, and no Children were educated, yet if it were (as I think, every one must own it is,) agreeable to the original *Christian Plan*, it would not be foreign to our Purpose; as it will prove, that if proper Precautions were taken, and Men were to act in Character, competent *Rational Evidence* might be attained, as young People grew up to a Capacity of exercising Reason; which is all that could be supposed Requisite. But bad as the World is, I bless God, I can confidently say, I have in the main Traces copied from the Life.
This

This, to my certain Knowledge, is the Care of *many Parents* and *Ministers*, and this the Felicity of *many Children*. The Success is generally answerable; and I hope, the Instances in which it is so in the *Protestant* World, are not to be numbered by Scores, but by Hundreds and Thousands, who are to be regarded as the precious *Seed of the Church* in the next Age, and who I doubt not will, in Spight of all the Efforts of *Infidelity*, exert themselves so effectually in its Service, that the *Gates of Hell* shall not prevail against it.

Nevertheless while I bless God, that this is the Case of so many, I very readily acknowledge, that, thro' a *Negligence*, for which I fear a Multitude of *Parents* and *Ministers* have a terrible Account to render before God, it is generally much otherwise. By far the greater Part of *professing Christians* have probably no better Reason to give for their Religion, than that they were early baptized into it, and have been trained up in some of its External Forms. Far from being instructed in its *Evidences*, they are hardly taught its *Doctrines*, or its *Precepts*; or superficially learn them from those, who do not themselves seem to be in good Earnest concerned about the one or the other. The fatal Consequence is too plain. The Corruptions of Nature, abetted by the Force of evil Examples, prevail against them; and they are early plunged into such licentious Practices, that if they ever reflect on the most evident and express Declarations of the Word of God, they must immediately see, that they are condemned by it.

Now there is no Reason to wonder, if many of *this Sort of Christians* are easy *Profelytes to Infidelity*. It is no surprizing Thing, if a bold Jest thrown upon *Scripture*, or a confident senseless Assertion of its Falschood, (perhaps from a Person, on whose
Word

24 *Danger of such as are not instructed.*

Word hardly any Thing else would be believed,) have with them all the Weight of a Demonstration. They will be little concerned to ask Information, or consider how Objections may be answered. Those magical Words, *Priest-craft*, and the *Prejudice of Education*, stun and terrify them. They submit, as you gravely express it, (*pag. 75.*) “ in the Impotence and Impuberty of a dutiful Under-
“ standing, in the tractable Simplicity of unpractised Reason: With the obsequious and humble
“ Acquiescence of a Babe, they sit down to learn
“ *their Lesson* ” too; and their *Unbelief*, after they have attained the Stature of *Men*, is just as *blind and implicit*, as the *Faith* of their *Childhood* was.

This, Sir, is undoubtedly the Case with many; and you cannot but have observed, what large Companies in the Free-Thinking Army are raised and enlisted from among these Vagabonds. But the Generality of Men among us, as in every Nation, go on thoughtlessly in the Religion in which they were educated: Hearing the Truth of it often asserted, and perhaps never hearing it contradicted, they entertain no Doubts on the Subject, but grow old in a mere speculative and ineffectual Assent to *Christianity*. And if their Heart at any Time smite them, with the Contrariety of their Temper and Conduct to the Rules which they acknowledge to be Divine, they seek their Shelter in the Hope of *making their Peace with GOD*, (as they commonly express it,) before they go out of World; and perhaps abuse some of the noblest Discoveries which the *Gospel* makes, as an Encouragement to continue in those Sins and Follies, from which it was expressly designed to reclaim them.

Nevertheless it frequently happens among such as these, that some are awakened to think deeply and seriously of Religion: The plain lively *Preaching*

ing of the *Gospel*, or perhaps some *afflictive Providence*, rouses them from their Lethargy. And I must reckon it among the chief Felicities of my Life, that I have had many Opportunities of observing, what are in Fact the Workings of Men's Spirits in such a Circumstance.

And here I have always found, that the Moral Perfections of the great Governour of the World appear to them in a very lively View: The Records of their own Consciences are thrown open before their Eyes, and they feel a Load of Guilt pressing on their Minds, of which they were before utterly insensible. Under this Anxiety, they hear of the *Remedy* which the *Gospel* has provided; and they hear of it with another Kind of Regard than formerly. It is what they now perceive, that they want; (strange, that they should have perceived it no sooner!) and it appears far more important to them, than Animal Life and all its Enjoyments. Hearing of the Love and Grace of a *Redeemer*, concerning the Reality of whose Undertaking they never had any considerable Doubt, their Hearts are transported with a Flow of most ardent and various Affections; they find another Kind of Energy in these Things, than they were ever aware, or could have imagined to be possible. *He has saved their Lives* at the Expence of his own; and under the *Constraints of his Love* they consecrate themselves to a forgiving God, with an Ardor of Soul which nothing but *Gratitude* can inspire. They do now, as it were, *receive the Gospel* anew from his Hand, not as a Revelation now made, but now first endeared to them, by a Sense of their own Concern in it; they exemplify the Beauty of its *Precepts*, and they feel the Force of its *Consolations*. A blessed Effect, in which I humbly acknowledge the Finger of God, and the Agency of his Spirit; tho' I see

26 *The Efficacy of the Gospel proves its Truth.*

no Reason to pretend to an *immediate Inspiration*, in the Sense which you maintain.

When the first Tumult of Affections, raised by so interesting and important a Scene, subsides, and the happy Converts come more coolly to reflect on what has passed, they draw a new Argument of the *Truth* of this glorious *Gospel* from its experienced *Efficacy*; and, tho' they cannot make a Stranger sensible of the Force of it, will say like *the Blind Man*, as yet little instructed in many other Proofs of our Lord's Divine Mission, *If he were not of GOD, he could not have opened my Eyes*; and under the lively Impression of it, the Sophistry of *modern Infidels* is as little to them, as that of the *Sanhedrim* was to him. At length, growing in Wisdom and Piety by their Acquaintance with the *Gospel*, and in Proportion to their Regard for it, they likewise, who had formerly no Taste and Sensibility for such Things, become qualified to take a more extensive Survey of its *Internal Evidence*, and to judge of it; and accordingly they see it much in the same Light with those, who had been formed to an earlier Subjection to it, and had grown up with it in their Hands and their Hearts.

Of these recovered Votaries to it, some who have a Head turned for *Reasoning*, perhaps from a Desire to serve others, and honour God, by defending *Christianity*, rather than from any Doubt which they themselves have of its Truth, set themselves to study the *Evidences of the Gospel*, as stated in some judicious Treatise on the Subject; which they carefully examine, and often ground so thoroughly in their Understanding and Memories, as to be able to *silence*, if not to *convince Gainsayers*. And others, who have not Leisure or Inclination to search so particularly into the whole Compass of the Argument, are perhaps greatly *confirmed in their Faith*,

The Force of some Impressions on the Mind. 27

Faith, by some *Circumstances* which powerfully impress them, tho' they may not be able to communicate the Force of the Argument to others; or tho' where it is communicated, it cannot publicly be stated, without Inconveniences which might overbalance the Advantages arising from the Discovery of such Occurrences.

I am sensible, Sir, I am touching on a Subject, which it is difficult to handle, without the Imputation of *Enthusiasm*, and perhaps without the Danger of it; and therefore I shall dismiss it in a few Words. I take upon me now to assert no Facts, either as my own Experience, or as on the Testimony of others, whom I may have Reason to credit; but I would suggest the Thought in Hypothesis. Is it in the Nature of Things *impossible*, or is it utterly *incredible*, that the Great Author and Governour of all should, in some rare Instances, even in these later Ages, deviate from the Laws by which he statedly rules the Natural World, for the Deliverance and Support of some of his faithful Servants in Circumstances of great Extremity; especially, when thereby the Interest of the Moral World may remarkably be promoted? Or supposing this to be ever so rare, I would further ask, Is it impossible, that he may, on a perfect View of every minutest Circumstance, have constituted the Course of Things in such a Manner, that there shall be a remarkable Correspondence between a Train of Thoughts in a *Christian's* Mind, and an Event arising from other Natural, but perhaps unobserved Causes, on which that Train of Thoughts could have no Influence? Do you, Sir, thoroughly understand the Law, by which Thoughts arise in our Mind? or can you say, by what Connection, one springs up rather than another? Can you account for it, why the Mind is sometimes so

28 *The Temper and Conduct of Believers*

much more forcibly struck, than at other Times, with the same Object; or why it sometimes feels itself directed strongly into a certain Channel, and Track of Thinking, in which it is not conscious to itself of a Self-determining Agency? Or are you sure, that there may not be a special gracious Appointment (whether Natural or Miraculous, I do not now contend,) in certain Events, the Causes of which are so unobserved, that we commonly, but perhaps rashly, say, they happen by Chance? That the Minds of many eminently wise and good Men have been greatly comforted and established by such Events, I am well assured; and it seems probable to me, that to well disposed Persons of weaker Abilities, they may more frequently happen: Nevertheless, as I know they are liable to a great Deal of Cavil, and that it is the Fashion of the Age to deride every Thing of this Nature, I will not urge this Argument in the present Debate, but content myself with having insinuated it. I think, I ought not entirely to have omitted it; and this seems its most proper Place.

It is, I hope, at least possible, that the *Faith* of an *illiterate Christian* may be not only really, but *rationally confirmed* by such Events; or, if you will admit the commonly received Phrase, by such *special Providences* as these. However I am sure, there is another Topick of Argument, which is frequently of great and important Service in this View, and which falls under the daily Observation of the *common People* as well as others, and of which they are as *competent Judges* as the most polite and learned of Mankind. I mean *that* which arises from comparing the *Temper and Conduct* of those who profess to *reject the Gospel*, with that of those who seem most cordially to *esteem and embrace it*.

If it were evident and notorious, that *Infidelity* did

did generally in Fact *make Men better*; if it increased their Reverence for the Divine Being, and made them more diligent, constant, and devout in paying their daily Homage before him; if it rendered them more sober and temperate, more mild and gentle, more upright and benevolent in their Behaviour; tho' this would be a most unaccountable Phenomenon to any one who examines the *Constitution of the Gospel*, (since *that* diminishes no Natural Motive to Virtue, and adds many peculiar to itself,) I do not say, that this Remark ought to *balance all the Evidence* on the other Side; yet I will venture, Sir, to say, that I think it would shock an honest and candid Mind, more than *all the Objections* I have ever seen or heard of, as advanced by our *modern Free-Thinkers*. But I firmly believe, that what Weight this Thought has, will be found in Favour of *Christianity*, and not in Opposition to it.

You well know, Sir, one can judge of these Things only by one's own Observation, and the Report of others. I will not now insist on the latter; and that what I have to say as to the former, may not be imputed to the Eagerness of Disputation, I think it not unbecoming my Character to use the Solemnity of saying in the Words of *St. Paul*, *I protest to you by our Rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus*, (and a stronger Asseveration I cannot use,) that I write on this Topick, as I would do if my Life were to conclude with this Letter, and I were directly to pass to account before the Judge of Hearts, for the Truth of what I say.

I condescend not to speak of a meer Freedom from gross and infamous Vices; but sure I am, that if I have ever seen amiable and sublime *Virtue* in the World, I have seen it among the humble *Disciples of Jesus*. Where Education and Circumstances in Life have been low, *Christian Principles* have, to my certain Knowledge, so far as Principles could

30 *The highest Virtue found among Christians,*

could be known from Behaviour, raised, animated, and ennobled the Mind. I have beheld, even in Cottages, that filial Devotion toward the Blessed God, that cordial Submission to his Will under the most painful Dispensations, that calm steady Fortitude, in the Midst of Evils which might have made a Philosopher tremble, that Chearfulness in the immediate Views of Death; and, in the Tenour of Lives which I have intimately known, that strict Integrity, that Diligence, that Contentment, that Readiness to do Good in full Proportion to their small Abilities, that generous Self-Denial to avoid what might grieve and offend others, and, to crown all, that tender Solitude for the Eternal Happiness of Friends, of Strangers, and sometimes of Enemies; which has often filled me with Wonder as well as Delight. I speak freely, as conscious both of the Truth and Importance of what I say; nor am I at all ashamed thus openly to acknowledge, that *my Faith in Christianity* has been not a little *established* by such Observations as these; which I bless God, have not been made in a few Instances; and I esteem the Evidence, not the less, but the more, because *Day-Labourers* might enter into it, as well as myself.

I doubt not, Sir, but Thousands more have also made Observations of this Kind; and that it will generally be found, that when the *Principles of Christianity* enter a Mind before unaffected with them, they produce this Effect, which indeed it is most natural they should. On the other Hand, as to *professed Infidels*, and it is on them only that the Observation can pertinently be made, I appeal to the World in general, whether they do not commonly *make Shipwreck of a good Conscience*, as well as of *Faith*, and plainly shew, that the *Precepts of the Gospel* are as disagreeable to them as *its Doctrines*. It would be strange indeed, if Good-Nature, a Sense

of Honour, and, especially in advanced Life, a Caution not to disgrace distinguishing Principles, did not restrain some from scandalous Enormities, and produce something agreeable in their Behaviour; but I believe, most who know the World will allow, that it is a peculiar Glory for any of this Sect, to maintain so much as an uniform external Appearance, of what the best *Heathen Moralists* have esteemed *Virtue*.

People of Attention and Reflection in the lower Ranks of Life, are not so stupid, as not to observe these Things, or to neglect drawing the obvious Inference from them: An Inference, in which they will be both directed, and supported, by that Maxim of our Divine Master, *By their Fruits ye shall know them*. What the *Morals* of *Infidel Writers* in private Life have been, it may seem difficult certainly to judge, because their Pieces have been mostly *anonymous*. Yet I cannot forbear observing, that some of those ingenious Authors have found out a Way of letting the World into *their Characters*, without publishing *their Names*; and that in some such palpable Instances, as one would almost ascribe to a *judicial Infatuation*, or think they had been *hired* to expose their own Cause to Contempt.

And this leads me farther to touch upon that *Confirmation*, which the *Faith* of plain *Christians* sometimes receives, from observing, not only the *Character* of those who would *subvert Christianity*, but also the *Manner* in which they often *manage their Opposition* to it.

Every one who can read his *Bible* may observe, (and it may be profitable for *Young Persons* especially, to be shewn it,) how *unjustly* the *Enemies of Revelation* often represent the *Doctrines* and *Facts* delivered in *Scripture*. He may see the *Calumnies*, which these Men often throw upon the *Inspired Writers*,

32 *Their Manner of opposing Christianity.*

ters, or those whom they celebrate, rolling off, like foul Water from the Down of a Swan, without leaving any Trace or Soil behind it. It is obvious also to remark, that instead of *examining*, or so much as *attempting to confute*, the *Arguments for Christianity*, which these Gentlemen cannot but know; they only advance their *Surmises*, and their *Possibilities*, or make vain Efforts to prove, that those Things *cannot in Reason be*, which *in Fact appear*.

It is not to be wondered, if honest Persons of plain Sense have soon *enough* of such Teachers, and do not often come to seek for *Grapes from Thorns*, or *Figs from Thistles*; or that if the boisterous Attacks, which are made on their Faith by such Methods, seem at first a little to loosen the Roots of it, the Storm afterwards serves only to fix it the faster, and to make Way for its farther Spread. Especially when they see, that *Arguments produced in Opposition to Christianity* often have as malignant an Aspect on *Natural Religion* too, and apparently tend to destroy all mutual Commerce among Mankind, which can never be carried on without some Confidence in the Testimony of each other. It is thus that *Meat* often comes out of the Eater, and *Sweetness* out of the Fierce; and the Subtile are taken in their own Craftiness. The Grossness of such visible and palpable Snares engages prudent People to avoid the Path in which they lie, and so secures them from others of a finer Contexture, and a more dangerous Form.

And thus, Sir, I have fulfilled my Promise, and given you a more distinct Account, than I remember to have met with elsewhere, of the *Rational Satisfaction* which many *Christians in common Life* have, and others under due Cultivation might without any Accuracy of Learning obtain, with Regard to the *Truth* of the *Religion* they profess.

And

And I do sincerely apprehend, that this Representation of the Matter, far different from that which you have given, if it appear just, will contain a compendious Answer to what you have suggested on the contrary Side of the Question; and be such a Reply to your Treatise, as *Walking* is to the celebrated Arguments which have been brought to demonstrate the *Impossibility of Motion*.

But here, Sir, as you tell your Friend, “ I am
“ very sensible, I have been holding you for some
“ Time past in the highest Impatience of Zeal, to
“ interpose and remind me,” that even *this Evidence* cannot be obtained by all;—that while it is pursued, it keeps the Mind in a State of dangerous Hesitation;—and where it is had, it is founded in the Prepossessions of Education,—in partial and imperfect Views of the Question;—that much of it depends upon precarious Human Testimony;—and consequently, that it cannot have Efficacy enough to satisfy the Mind, to controll irregular Affections, or to animate against those Extremities, which the *Gospel* may sometimes require us to endure in its Defence. Each of these Particulars you object in your Pamphlet; and I do not remember any Thing material suggested in it, and proper to be considered in this Place, which does not fall under one or another of these Heads.

Now as to the first of these, it is indeed true, that *all the Evidence* which I have here described, *cannot* probably be attained by all; tho’ I am confident a great deal more might be done for this Purpose, in an enlightened and *Protestant* Country like ours, than we generally see. Care might be taken, especially if the richer Kind of People had a becoming Compassion on their poor Neighbours, to teach *all Children to read*, and to furnish *all Families with Bibles*; as also to put such

34 *Means may be used to lead to this Evidence.*

Catechisms into their Hands, as contain some Hints of the *Reasons of Christianity*. And if that which *Dr. Thomas Burnet* has drawn up in so plain and concise a Manner, were to be used, I will venture to say, that *Children* will be furnished with *Reasons for being Christians*, which so far as I can learn, the most sagacious *Deists* have been too wise to attempt directly to answer; and till they both attempt, and effect it, the Understanding of a Child may see, that whatever else they do is of very little Importance. There are also several other plain and popular Pieces, * which may, with a very small Expence of Money and Time, be purchased and perused by young People: And if they were to be read two or three Times over in Families on the Evening of a Lord's Day, Children, and Servants might by an attentive Hearing be enabled to give some Reason of the Hope that is in them. And till they come to be capable of understanding such plain Things as these, if they have no Reason to believe their Bible to be true, but that they find it excellently good, and see it believed and revered by the wisest and best of those around them, it is, I suppose, at least as good a Ground for their Faith, as such Infant Understandings can have for Infidelity. Nor will it be easy to invent any Scheme, by which a Child shall attain any Knowledge at all, without some Confidence in the Veracity and Skill of its Parents, or other Teachers.

Indeed Sir, according to the injurious Representation you have made of Human Nature, this is the Case, not of little Children alone, but of most who are grown up to Years of Maturity. "The Generality of Apprehensions" say you, (pag. 17.) "extend not beyond a simple Proposition, and
" are

* Either the *Three Sermons* mentioned above, pag. 20. or the *Bishop of London's Pastoral Letters*; or a Pamphlet intitled *Plain Reasons for being a Christian*; or the First Part of the *Gentleman's Religion*.

“ are thrown out at once at the very Mention of
“ introducing a Medium ; ” that is, in plain
Terms, they are not *Rational Creatures*. I shall
not now urge, how inconsistent this is with the
Arguments, by which those that call themselves
(by a strong Catachresis) *Freethinkers*, attempt to
reason People out of a Regard to *Revelation* ; and
that, even by maintaining the Natural Abilities of
the Human Mind to discover, without any Super-
natural Assistance, every Thing in Religion
which we are concerned to know. You, Sir,
are too zealous a *Christian* to be pressed with such a
Consequence ; or to be told, that if your subsequent
Discourse (pag. 18, 19.) be right, when taken in
Connection with this Principle, it will lead to a
Conclusion, that Men may live at Random, not
having *Sense enough* to be capable of rendering an
Account to God for their Actions. It would, I
doubt not, be well for some, if this were indeed the
Case ; but I hope, none that pretend to *reason against*
Religion, will imagine they have any Pretence to
take Shelter in such a Thought. If this Admoni-
tion be a Digression, you will I hope pardon it,
in Favour of those, who I dare say are the greatest
Admirers of your Performance ; and I will now
return to remind you, in direct Answer to what
you advance, that daily Experience shews the Capa-
cities of Mankind in general not to be *so weak*, as
(just to serve a present Purpose,) you are pleased
to suppose them. Do not People in low Life
reason on the common Occurrences of it ? Do they
not learn the *Art of Numbers*, and often know how
to apply it in Cases, where the Reason of that Ap-
plication requires much more than *one Medium* to
find it out ? I suppose, the *Natural Understanding* of
Men in different Stations of Life is on an Average
pretty Equal, and that *Education* generally makes
the *chief Difference* ; and I have had an Opportunity

36 *Examination does not require so much Time,*

of observing, that among those who enter on *Academical Studies*, (and *Reasoning* is not much cultivated in *Grammar Schools*,) there is not one in some Scores, who, with proper Instructions, does not in a few Days grow capable of entering into the Force of *Euclid's Demonstrations*. And I hope, none will have so little Modesty as not readily to acknowledge, that the *Reasonings* by which *Christianity* is proved in the *plain Pieces* I referred to above, are much easier and less abstruse, than those relating to the Properties of *Mathematical Figures* to Persons to whom they are entirely new. *Objections* therefore taken from the supposed *Impossibility* of entering into the Proofs offered, can only take Place with regard to Persons, who when grown up are so unhappy as to *want common Sense*; of whom it cannot be supposed, that either of us intended to speak, in what we have said on either Side of the Question in Debate between us.

But you will not fail to remonstrate, as you have already done at large, (*pag. 13, 14.*) that supposing the *Rational Evidence* of *Christianity* ever so intelligible, it will at least *require Time* for the most candid Enquirer to make himself Master of it; and while he is pursuing it, he continues in a State of *extream Danger*; because he is *hesitating* about that, on an immediate Compliance with which his Salvation depends. But to this, which really appears to me the most considerable Difficulty you have suggested, I beg leave to answer, that the *Examination* requires not near so much *Time* as you would represent; and that while the Mind is pursuing it, there is no Need at all that it should be in a State of *Infidelity*, and consequently of *Danger* as to its final Happiness, if Life should end before the Examination is finished.

You,

No Need to read every Controversial Piece. 37

You, Sir, I think by one of the most palpable Sophisms that I have any where met with, every where affect to represent the Case in Question, as if a Man could have no *Rational Evidence* of *Christianity*, till he had enquired, on the one Hand, into every Thing that could be said, either to confirm, or even to illustrate it; and, on the other, into every *Objection* that has been brought against it. And if this be not granted, all your Flourishes (pag. 61,—63.) will be meer Ornaments of Wit and Eloquence, entirely wide of the Matter in Debate. On the contrary, it seems self-evident, that this is so far from being necessary to make a rational and intelligent *Christian*, that it is not necessary to constitute an able and an accomplished *Divine*. View it in any other Instance, and you cannot but allow what I say. Would you maintain, that a Man cannot be fit to practise as a *Lawyer*, or a *Physician*, till he has read every Thing that has been writ in any Controversy relating to those Professions? It would be much more apparently absurd, to insist upon this *Polemical Omniscience*, (if I may be allowed the Expression,) in the Case before us: Since at that Rate a competent *Number of Infidels* might, without urging one material Argument, overthrow *Christianity*, supposing it in itself ever so *Rational*, merely by writing a greater *Number of Books* about it, than any one Man could be able to read.

On the whole, *Controversies* relating to *Christianity* are endless; but what is *essential* to the Proof of it lies within a very little Room, and may be set in so plain and easy a Light, that a Man may in a few Hours with attentive Thought be competently Master of the Argument. If indeed he desires copiously and curiously to examine the particular Branches of it, he must allow proportionable Time and Labour; but it is by no means necessary, tho' you,

38 *Every Topick of Argument not fundamental.*

you, Sir, seem constantly to take it for granted, that he should be all this while *in Suspense*, as to the *Truth of the Gospel* in general. Every Topick of Argument is not so *fundamental*, as that the whole *Evidence of Christianity* should depend on that Topick; much less is every particular Proof belonging to each Topick so; and least of all, the Circumstance of every particular Proof. I might, for Instance, see great Reason to believe *Christianity* to be true, even tho' I knew nothing of its extraordinary Success and speedy Propagation in the first Ages of the Church: Or I might be sure, that it was early propagated thro' vast Tracts of Land, with Circumstances which afford a strong Conviction of its Truth, tho' I were yet to learn, whether it reached *India* or *Britain* during those early Days; and if it did, whether the *Christians* of *St. Thomas* received it from the *Apostle* of that Name, or our happy Island from *St. Paul*. I may be sure, that *Jesus* was prophesied of in the *Old Testament*, while I am entirely dubious how *Daniel's Weeks* are to be calculated; nay, I may be uncertain as to some Niceties in the Calculation, and yet be in general sure, that the Period they mark out is elapsed, and that it ended much about the Time of *Christ*.

And as a Consequence of all this it is evident, that *Books* on various Topicks relating to *Christianity* may be highly valuable, and yet by no means necessary to lay a *Rational Foundation* for our Faith. They may suggest new Thoughts; they may place Arguments urged many Ages ago, in a clearer and more beautiful Light; they may obviate Difficulties, which ingenious Men have started, and artfully aggravated; and thus they may demand the Esteem and Gratitude of the *Christian World*, to which the learned and worthy *Authors* of the *Analogy between Reason and Revelation*, and of the *Trial of the Witnesses*, are undoubtedly intitled; and yet

“ the

Q

“ the Evidence of the *Gospel*, like its great Author,
“ might be *the Same Yesterday, to Day, and for*
“ *Ever,*” notwithstanding all you are pleased so
shrewdly to insinuate on this Head. (*Pag. 20,—22.*)

But waving this, which, tho’ I thought it necessary to touch upon it here, relates not immediately to the Case of *common Christians*, you will, I doubt not, be ready to remind me, that let the *Evidence* to be offered to their Consideration be ever so *short*, and ever so *plain*, yet *some Time* must be taken up in *examining* it, even that Part of it which is *most essential*; and while that *Examination* continues, they must be in a State of *dangerous Hesitation*; since *to doubt* concerning the *Truth of Christianity* is (according to your Representation of the Matter,) a *Damnable Apostacy* from it.

In answer to *this Part* of the *Objection* I am compelled to say, that I apprehend there is in it a Complication of Errors. I cannot, in the first place, see how the *Faith* of a *Christian* is utterly cancelled by every *Doubt* and *Suspicion* which arises in his Mind. Our Thoughts are not entirely under our own Command, and Natural Temper may sometimes suggest Fears, which *Reason* can neither authorise, nor exclude. The humble *Christian*, conscious on the one Hand, of the Imperfection of his Character, and on the other, of the Greatness of his Hopes, may be ready sometimes to suspect, that the *Gospel* is *too good News to be true*. Now where will you find your Proofs, either from *Scripture*, or from *Reason*, that every such *Suspicion* is an *Apostacy from the Faith*, and that it is *damnable* thus to be tempted?

But to cut the grand Sinew of your *Objection*, I will presume to say, how widely soever it may differ from the Schemes you have formed on this Subject, that I apprehend, a Man may be *rationally established*
in

40 *Strong Presumptions in Favour of the Gospel.*

in the Faith of the *Gospel*, and may have candidly examined the Evidences of it, without *ceasing to believe it* while he pursues *that Examination*; which I think may easily appear from what I have represented above, and I the rather repeat it, as you, Sir, seem so studious to keep your Reader from one Thought of it.

Having once learnt what the *Gospel Scheme* is, I can never doubt of its being admirably calculated to elevate, to purify, and to strengthen the Soul, to fix it on God, and to open it in Sentiments of the most sincere and generous Benevolence to Men. Of this I am as sure, as that there is a *Gospel Scheme* at all, or such a Book as the *New Testament* existing in the World. Nor can I ever question for a Moment, after having read that admirable Book with Attention, that there seem to be in it all imaginable Signs of Integrity, Piety, and Goodness in the Heart of its Writers. Both these will appear *strong Presumptions* of its Truth and Authority, and such as would require cogent Arguments on the other Side to balance them: Arguments, which till I hear, I see no Reason to set myself to surmise. And as it is likely in *Theory*, that a *Religion* attended with strong *Internal Evidence*, will not be left destitute of *External*, I shall set myself to examine into that, under the Apprehension of a *strong Probability*, that it will turn out *in Favour of the Gospel*.

I remember indeed, that you somewhere speak with sovereign Contempt of “*that Enquiry*, which “ is intended with a shrewd *Foreboding* how the “ Matter will end.” But I must intreat you to ask yourself again, whether it is not possible for the most impartial Mind, in some Cases, to have such *Forebodings*; nay, whether it be always possible to avoid them, even when entering on the most resolutely *impartial Examination*? Consider the Matter in Subjects where the severest *Reasoning* takes Place,

Place, and where there can be no Interest to bribe the Assent, I mean, where *Mathematical Theorems* are concerned.

I question not, Sir, but you have observed, if you ever turned your Thoughts this Way at all, that there is often an observable Proportion in the *Figure of a Diagram*, which leads a Man to think the Proposition *true*, as soon as he reads it. Besides, that having found *Demonstration* attending all the former Propositions, suppose of *Euclid*, he naturally concludes, he shall find it in the Proposition in Question. He would not perhaps accept a Bett of a thousand Guineas to one, against the Force of a *Demonstration*, which he has not yet studied; and which, notwithstanding this grand *Foreboding*, he shall be able as freely and fairly to canvass, as he ever did any of the former. So little does there seem in *this Part* of the Argument, which you have pushed with so much Eagerness and Triumph.

But to return to the Case of *young Persons*, to be instructed in the *Evidences of Christianity*, the Matter we were considering, and from whence my Regard to this favourite Topick of yours led me to digress a little too far:—I freely own, and leave you, Sir, to make the best of the *Concession*, I would not have Youth led into any *Doubts* about these Matters, till their Understandings arrive at a Strength and Solidity capable of encountering with them. I would not represent *Christianity* to my *Catechumens*, or my *Children*, nor indeed to the most intelligent and judicious of my Hearers, as a *dubious uncertain Thing*, where the Probabilities were so equal, that it was quite *precarious* which Way an honest Enquirer would see Reason to determine. It appears to my Reason, and Conscience, quite in another Point of Light, as an *evident and certain Truth*, which I assuredly know; in which I re-

42 *Enquirer need not be wholly indifferent.*

joice as the *Anchor of my own Soul*, and which I verily believe must be the *Salvation of theirs*, if they are saved at all. With these Views it would be a horrible *Iniquity* in me, to speak *slightly* and *dubiously* about it: Yet I may, in a perfect Consistence with this Perswasion, and with the Declaration of it, recommend it to others, not as on my own Authority, but on the Force of *Reasons*, concerning the Strength of which they are to *judge for themselves*; tho' I am ever so earnestly solicitous, that they may *judge aright*, as knowing how strictly they are to answer for the Integrity of their Conduct in this Affair.

But here I am well aware, you will glory over me as convicted by my own Confession. You will tell me, that all this Scheme of *educating Children in Christian Principles*, and recommending them with so much Confidence and Delight, is an avowed Method of *prejudicing* their Minds strongly on one Side of the Question, and utterly inconsistent with any Pretence of bringing them to a *fair and honest Enquiry*; in order to which it is absolutely necessary, that a Man come to *search after Truth* without any pre-conceived Opinion at all, and perfectly *indifferent* on which Side he may happen to find it.

This I confess, Sir, has a plausible Sound, and is a charming Subject for a *young Academick*, or a *very young Preacher*, if he has a Mind to display his Talent at Declamation: But after all, it is perfect *Knight Errantry*, and lays down a Law to Mankind, which it is in many Instances *impossible* they should follow, and which of Consequence can be neither *necessary*, nor *reasonable*. The Affections of the Human Mind may indeed be controlled, but they cannot be extirpated; nor is it needful Men should be *insensible*, in order to their being impartial. Had

Junius

Absurd to leave Children untaught in Religion. 43

Junius Brutus, when he saw *his Sons* arraigned before him for Treason against their Country, been thus philosophically *indifferent* whether they were innocent or guilty, he had been *the Idiot* he formerly counterfeited, or something worse than that; and yet he *did Justice*: And in other Circumstances, with all the Bowels of a Father melting over them, he might have been *equally just* in acquitting them. A Man may have *strict Reason* for assenting, to what he has been *taught* from his very Infancy, and where the *Truth* is greatly for *his Interest*; or otherwise who could have *Reason* to believe himself *Heir* to a Kingdom, or an Estate? A Man may, I hope, have *Reason* to believe the *Being of a GOD*, yet who among us was not *taught it from a Child*? or what virtuous Mind does not see, that *all its Happiness* is concerned in the Question? Who would not esteem it far worse than Death, to be brought to an Apprehension that he lives in a *fatherless World*, and that all the Resource which he thought he had found in the Guardianship of infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, was but the Amusement of a pleasing Dream?

And while I am on this Topick, give me Leave to touch on that Notion, which some have entertained, of *leaving Children untaught in Religion*, that they may come *unprejudiced* to enquire into it: An *Absurdity* surely to be numbered among the greatest, which the adventurous *Infidelity* of the present Age has started, or its *implicite Disciples* have imbibed, in open, and perhaps boasted *Defiance* of the *common Sense* of Mankind throughout all Ages, Nations, and Religions. And yet I am told, some who have continued to call themselves *Christians*, have been wild enough to admit it. With them indeed I might justly cut short farther Debate, by urging, what on their *professed Principles* must be unanswerable, the most express *Authority* both of the *Jewish*

44 *The Propriety and Use of early Instruction.*

and *Christian Revelations*, strongly requiring that *Children* should be brought up in an early and familiar Acquaintance with them. But for the Sake of others I would observe, and would intreat every professed *Disciple of Reason* to consider, that the Notion of omitting an *Education in Religion*, to avoid *Prejudice*, is utterly inconsistent with itself. For it is certain, as the World now goes, and every *Infidel* must surely in his Conscience know it, that if the *Children of Christians* are not taught *Religion*, and trained up in the Exercises of it, they will soon learn *Vice* and *Immorality*, and then they will come to enquire into the *Evidences of Christianity* in Time; (if they ever make the Enquiry at all,) with this terrible *Prejudice* on the Negative Side of the Question, “ If *Christianity* be true, I am in a
“ State of Condemnation, and an Heir of everlasting
“ Ruin : And I must relinquish all the dearest
“ of my Pleasures, in Pursuit of a pretended Fe-
“ licity, which I had rather be annihilated, than
“ confined to.”

And indeed, Sir, we would gladly know, if *Children* are not to be taught *Religion*, on what Principles they are to be taught *Virtue*. The Philosophical Questions relating to the first Principles, and ultimate Obligations of *Morality*, they can as little understand as those of *Religion* : And if they are to be taught it, as in itself an *amiable Thing*, and a Thing which their Parents know to be *reasonable* and conducive to their *Happiness*, they may on the like Foundation be taught, to receive the *Gospel* as the *Word of GOD*, and, according to their little Abilities, to worship, and live like *Christians*.

I think I may conclude this Head with an Appeal to every Man's Conscience, Whether it would not be best for Society in general, that our *Children* should be taught *Christianity* in their early Years ? Whether the History of a Life and Character like
that

Hints to be given of the chief Objections. 45

that of the blessed *Jesus*, be not one of the finest Lessons they can learn? And whether an Apprehension of our Obligations to him as our great *Redeemer*, who, as the Messenger and Gift of his Father's Love, taught such excellent Truths, and did and suffered so much for our *Salvation*, be not admirably calculated to touch their tender Hearts, and form them to Humility, Gratitude, and Love? I hope, Men of such lordly and towering Understandings, as our *Deists* generally are, will at least condescend to *own this* of the *Gospel*, which wise Men will reckon no small Circumstance in its Favour: And these Gentlemen must pardon me when I add, that had their own Minds been more deeply touched with it, *their Understandings* might have been more solid, in Proportion to the Degree in which their own Opinion of them had been less exalted.

But should you allow this, you may still insist, that according to the Scheme I have proposed, our young *Christian*, in his most advanced Stage, must have very *partial* and *imperfect Views* of the Question; since I have supposed him chiefly to have heard the Advocates on one Side, and have not made the Perusal of *Infidel Writers*, or an Attendance upon *such Catechists*, if such there be, any Part of our Method.

It is here obvious to reply, that I have advised, as young Persons grow up towards Manhood, to give them some *Hints* of the *main Objections* which are generally made to *Christianity*; or at least some View of the *chief Topicks*, from whence those *Objections* are taken. A *Christian Parent*, or *Minister*, will of Course do this in such a Manner, as to shew that there seems to him to be *very little Weight* in them, when compared with the *Evidence* in Favour of our *Religion*; and this he may do in perfect Consistence with giving a plain and honest View of
of

46 *The Evidence on both Sides must be weighed*

of the *Strength of the Objection*, which to be sure he ought to give, if he mentions it at all.

This may commonly suffice; yet I readily acknowledge, there are Circumstances, in which it may be very expedient to enter into a more *particular Detail* of *Objections* and *Answers*. This I take to be especially the Case of those, who are *educated for the Ministry*; and perhaps I might add, of *Gentlemen* intended for the Practice of *the Law*, and indeed of all whose Incomes can afford what is commonly called *a liberal Education*. The strong Temptations, to which such Persons are generally exposed, might, I think, require proportionable Antidotes. At least I am persuaded, every considerate Person will acknowledge, that it is incumbent on those who are to be the *Teachers* and *Guardians* of *Religion*, to be well acquainted with its *Proofs*; in order to which, let *such*, by all means, before they appear in a publick Character, examine the *Evidence on both Sides*. And whatever Use they may make of a *Tutor* on this Occasion, as to the Method and Order of their Studies, and whatever Confidence they may place in his Integrity and Capacities, let them not acquiesce in whatever *Abstracts* he may give them of the *Objections* which our *Adversaries* advance; but let them attentively peruse the most celebrated *Pieces*, which have been written by them; and what they are, no Man of tolerable Acquaintance with the World can be long to seek. Thus let them hear *Infidels* pleading their own Cause; at the same Time weighing, which Justice and Common Sense will require, those *Answers* which have been returned by the learned *Advocates for Christianity*, in which our Country, above all others, has been so eminently happy.

Sad indeed is the Drudgery *our younger Brethren* must go through, in reading such *Authors*, as many of those who have attacked *Religion*; as I well know

by publick Persons, and especially Ministers. 47

know by my own painful and laborious Experience. But the *Confirmation* which their *Faith* may receive, by the very Efforts made to overthrow it, will, I hope, in many Instances, be a sufficient Reward. And as *these Pieces*, especially in the Hand of *Second Rate Writers*, contain little more than a confident and unwearied *Repetition* of the *same Objections*, which have been *answered* perhaps many Scores and Hundreds of Times, without taking any Notice of those *Replies*; (which, whether it be owing to the *Learning*, or *Modesty* of the Authors, I will not undertake to say;) one who is acquainted with these Controversies will be able to dispatch large Volumes in a little Time, and will see that many of them need no *New Answers*. All which will be Circumstances of some Consolation under so tedious a Task.

This, Sir, is a Method in the *Education* of young *Ministers*, which is practised, even among the *Protestant Dissenters*, in the midst of those many Disadvantages under which *their Tutors* and *Students* labour; in several of whose little *Seminaries*, to my certain Knowledge, the *rational Evidences* of *Natural* and *Revealed Religion*, with such a View of the *Objections* against both, are as regularly, and as methodically taught, as *Logick* or *Geometry*, or any of the other Sciences: And with what superior Advantages this important Branch of Learning is cultivated in our *Two celebrated Universities*, it is not for me to say, or perhaps to imagine. But as for the *common People*, I hope, none will be so unreasonable as to insist upon it, that they should *spend their Money* for that which is not *Bread*, or *their Labour* for that which will yield them so little *Satisfaction*, as a *Course of Polemicks* would in their Circumstances do. For them, the plain and practical Method I have offered above, seems abundantly sufficient. And if *Objections* come in their Way, which in this free
Age

48 *Others may determine without reading all,*

Age may very probably happen, let them apply to those who may be most like to answer them, and weigh the *Answers* seriously and impartially; at the same time humbly addressing the great *Father of Lights*, to lead them into *all necessary Truth*, and to preserve them from *every dangerous Mistake*, in a Matter of such apparent Moment: And, with these Precautions, *Reason* and *Experience* concur to teach me, that their *Christian Friends* need be in no Pain for the Event. Their Enquiries, as I before observed, may be *impartial*, and their Determinations *rational*, without *knowing every Thing* that has been said, on one Side, and the other. And for them to remain still *undetermined*, from an impatient *Suspicion*, that some Body might have something to say which they never heard, but which, if they knew it, might be an invincible *Objection to Christianity*, is a Conduct into which no one will be like to fall, who is not pretty heartily resolved to be an *Infidel* at all Adventures. For if there be any good Sense in such a Turn of Mind, it must be a Foundation of *universal Scepticism* in all the *Affairs of Life*, as well as in *Religion*; and would be full as *absurd*, as if a *Jury* should refuse to give a *Verdict* upon the *Evidence* they have already received, because it is possible there may be some absent Persons in the World, who, if they were present, might give such Information as would turn the Scale the contrary Way.

On the whole, it seems to me strictly *reasonable*, that as every Man should seriously *reflect* on the Nature, Genius, Tendency, and Evidence, of those *Religious Principles* in which he has been brought up; so he should continue to *adhere to them*, till he sees an *Evidence against it*, at least *equal to that* which he has *for it*. And I farther apprehend, that there are certain *Degrees of Evidence* attending many *Truths*, of one Kind and another,

Moral

Moral and Religious, as well as *Mathematical*, in which a candid and upright Man may see Reason to *acquiesce*, without giving himself perpetual Trouble in renewing his Enquiries, as long as he lives; and concerning which he may have a *rational Apprehension*, that he shall never meet with any Thing to be urged against them, which is worthy of his Notice, unless it should be for the Sake of others, rather than for his own. Whether this be not the Case with Regard to *Christianity*, every one must judge for himself, as in the Sight of God, and on a Review of the Information he has gained with Respect to it. Yet it is possible, that when his Judgment is thus determined in its Favour, *Objections* against it may afterwards occur to him, which tho' he does not seek, he may not be able to avoid hearing. Of these, some may be such, as he has already *weighed in the Balance*, and found *wanting*: Others may immediately appear to affect only what is *circumstantial*, in the *Evidence* on which he has already yielded his Assent, and not what is *essential* to it; or at most, but a small *Part* of the *Evidence*, which if it were to be given up, the main Strength of that various and complex Argument in which he before acquiesced, might remain secure; as for Instance, the Meaning of some particular *Prophecy* which he thought to refer to *Christ*, or the like. Now I apprehend, that by far the greater Part of what is commonly advanced against *Christianity*, perhaps Nineteen *Objections* in Twenty, will, to one well instructed and experienced in *Religion*, be reducible to one or other of these Heads. As for those which fall under neither of them, I doubt not, but they will soon appear to be built on some *Ignorance* or *Misrepresentation* of the Plan of *Revelation*, which will I hope never want pious and learned Votaries, capable of defending it, and of turning the Difficulties urged

50 *Faith is not built on mere Human Testimony.*

against it, or the Manner in which they are treated, into Occasions of adding increasing Lustre to its Proofs, and perhaps, into Arguments in its Favour; as the World has already seen in frequent Instances.

The chief remaining *Objection* is, that according to the Plan laid down above, we shall have our *Faith* built upon mere *Human Testimony*, which you, Sir, represent as a most *fallacious* and *uncertain Thing*, utterly unfit to be the Foundation of so important a Superstructure. It is by no means necessary here to repeat all the diminutive Things, which you are pleased to say of *Human Testimony*, without any Distinction, and with as much Severity, as if you judged of it in general, by what you may have found in some *Deistical Writings*. It all centers in depreciating its Validity; and the Reader will soon see, how far it is to be regarded, as just in itself, or as applicable to the present Occasion.

And here I must, in the first Place, remind you, that the Article now in Question does not at all concern, or affect, the *Internal Evidence* of *Christianity*, which of itself alone is a very considerable Thing; especially when it is considered, how *probable* it is, that God might *favour the World* with a *Revelation*, which in its present Condition it so evidently *needs*. It is not on *Testimony*, that I believe, there is such a Book as the *Bible* in the World. I see it, and read it: And that it is in the main *rightly translated*, even an *illiterate Christian* among us may be sure; because if there had been any gross Prevarication in this Respect, considering the *Variety of Sects* among us, Clamours must have arisen, which he sees in Fact do not arise, between the contending Parties; as I have elsewhere argued more at large *. And therefore *all the Proofs* of the

* See *Sermons on the Power and Grace of Christ*, &c. Ser. 8.

the *Divine Authority* of this Book, that arise from its Contexture, Design, Harmony, and Efficacy, which I mentioned above, are quite *independent*, even on that *Human Testimony*, on which its Genuineness depends, and are built on Sense, Observation, and Experience.

There are indeed other, and those I confess *very material*, *Proofs of Christianity*, in which some considerable Regard to *Human Testimony* is absolutely necessary: But before we farther discuss these, give me Leave to ask you, Sir, Will you, or any Man of Candour and Common Sense, venture to assert, that we are in no Circumstances obliged to admit the *Truth* of any Fact on the *Testimony* of other Men? You cannot but know, how often the contrary has been demonstrated, by all our best Writers on this Subject: Nay, I think, you cannot but see, at the first Glance, the glaring *Absurdity* of such a Principle. Does not the Course of Human Life every Day declare, what is, and must be, the Sense of Mankind with Regard to this? Are not Things of the utmost Importance, in which not only the Estates and Lives of particular Persons, but the Interests of whole Nations are concerned, undertaken and determined on the Credit of *Testimony*? and is it not absolutely necessary, they should turn upon it? How *dishonest* then, and how *shameful*, would it be to assert, that it is to be regarded in other Things of the greatest Moment, but not in those which relate to the Support of the *Gospel*.

If there be any Thing particular in *that Evidence* to which we appeal on this Occasion, which renders it *unworthy of Regard*, let our Adversaries shew it plainly. You will not, Sir, I am persuaded, think fit to assert, that *every Fact* must of Course be *given up*, which is said to have happened *almost Two thousand Years ago*; or that we can never be sure, that *Books* are *genuine*, which pretend to *such Antiquity*

as that. Are all the *Classicks* of *Greece* and *Rome* spurious? Or is it to be numbered among the Uncertainties of Antiquity, whether *Cyrus* conquered *Babylon*, and whether *Julius Cæsar* was assassinated in the Senate? *These Facts* are of *more antient Date*, than any which are asserted in the *New Testament*: Yet, are you a *Sceptick* with Regard to them? Were you as sure, that you should be possessed of all imaginable Happiness for a Million of Years, as you are of the one or other of these Things, would you entertain any afflictive *Doubt* with Regard to it? or would you risk what you were to hold by such a Tenure, for the certain Enjoyment of any Thing in mortal Life? A Man's own Heart easily answers him such Questions as these: And yet the *Testimony* in Support of *Christianity* is slighted, tho' it is most easy to shew, that it is far superior to *that* by which we are informed of *Cyrus's Conquests*, or of *Cæsar's Death*.

The only remaining Question therefore on this Head, is not concerning the Learned, but *common Christians*, and the *rational Satisfaction* which they are capable of receiving, with Regard to *those Facts*, on which the *External Evidence of Christianity* depend. And here I doubt not, but they may receive *competent Satisfaction*; that is, they may see much greater *Reason to believe them*, than they can possibly have *to reject them*; which is all the Matter requires.

To evince this, let us consider, what *those Facts* are, on which their *Reasonings* with Respect to the *External Evidence* depend; for that is properly the precise Question. And they are chiefly these:—That there was such a Person as *Jesus Christ*,—who founded a *Religion*,—which was received by *Multitudes of People* quickly after his Death, (*i. e.* about 1700 Years ago;)—many of which *Con-*
verts

verts testified their firm Persuasion of its Truth by enduring great Extremities in its Defence:—That among these *antient Christians*, there were such Persons as the *Evangelists* and *Apostles*,—who wrote the chief *Books* of the *New Testament*;—which *Books* are in the main transmitted safely and faithfully down to us:—As also, that when *Christ* and his *Apostles* lived, the *Jews* did subsist as a People,—and had in their Hands *Books* which they accounted *Sacred*,—in the main the same with those, which we now call the *Old Testament*.

These, Sir, are the *grand Facts*, which we prove by *Testimony*, and with which we connect our Reasoning in Favour of the *Gospel*. What the *Testimony* is by which we confirm these *Facts*, and what the *Connection* by which we infer *Christianity* from them, I (among many others,) have elsewhere shewn at large; and I have too much other Business, and too much with you in particular before me, to swell this Letter by so unnecessary a Repetition.

Now with Regard to *common Christians*, of whose attainable Satisfaction we are treating, I readily own, they cannot be fully Masters of that Evidence, which Learned Men may receive of these *Facts*, by consulting the *Original Writers*: Yet they are certainly capable of knowing something of considerable Importance even on this Head, where their Disadvantages must be acknowledged the greatest of all. Every plain Reader sees many *antient Authors* quoted, as testifying such and such Things, and perhaps sees at the Bottom of the Page, *Characters* or *Words* which he cannot understand; but he reads the supposed Sense of them in *English*, and is told, if the Book be properly written, about what Time the Author produced is said to have lived. Now it can never enter into his Heart to imagine, that in an enlightened Age, *Christian Divines*, publishing their Names with their Works, or if they do

54 *Easy to see there is no Room for Fraud here.*

do not, seeming *zealous for Christianity*, would have so little *Regard* to themselves, or their Cause, as to pretend to quote such Passages, unless the *Books* from whence they were taken were certainly *extant*; and the Passages to be found there, containing the Sense which they give them. The Matter does not by any means rest upon our *personal Integrity*; (tho' I hope, in reporting a Fact, some *Regard* might be paid to *that*;) Were the *Defenders of Christianity* ever so *dishonest*, it cannot be imagined they would obtrude such *palpable Falsehoods* on the World, while so liable to be *contradicted*, and *shamed*, by those who *disbelieve the Gospel*, and make it the great, tho' wretched Business of their Lives, to oppose it to the utmost of their Power, and to revile its *Preachers* and *Defenders*. But are these *Assertions of ours* as to the Passages in Question *contradicted*? Where is the *Deist* who will dare to say, that *Christianity* is not an *antient Religion*; that it did not *arise* and *spread* about the *Time* I have mentioned; or that its *Professors* did not early *suffer* in its Defence? Where is the Man who will venture to assert, that the most material *Books* of the *New Testament* were not *early received* by *Christians*; or that the *Authors* in which we assert, that we find *Quotations* from them, and *References* to them, did not really *live* in the *Ages* and *Places* we assert? Our *Books* are open; and the *Facts* and *Testimonies*, on which we build our Reasonings, are liable to be *examined* with all possible Freedom, by our *Enemies*, as well as our *Friends*. If we have Recourse to any *Pious Frauds*, (as they are scandalously called,) let those *Frauds* be detected; and, in the Name of the *GOD of Truth*, let them be hissed out of the World, with a just Abhorrence. But the contrary is so plain, that there is not an *Infidel* in our Land, that will presume to *oppose the Evidence* of these Things, and to *set his Name* to such an Attempt:

Attempt: Nay, either some Remains of Modesty, or a Consciousness of the Hurt which their Cause would receive from so shameless a Defence, prevents even *anonymous Authors* from attacking us here. The Controversy is concerning the *Consequences* drawn from these *acknowledged Facts*; (that *Christianity* was an *antient Religion*, and the *New Testament* early received, &c.) Now of *these Consequences* the *common People* are themselves *Judges*, on Principles laid down above; and they do not admit them, because we, or any others, assert them to follow.

And here, Sir, I cannot forbear admiring the Wisdom of *Divine Providence*, in permitting such perverse *Opposition to the Gospel* to arise, and continue; since even its avowed *Enemies*, by the Nature and Manner of their Attack, serve but more assuredly to *confirm the Faith* of impartial and intelligent Enquirers, and give an *Authority* and *Evidence* to what the *Teachers of Christianity* assert, in some Measure beyond what it could otherwise have had. Just as another Kind of *Infidels*, I mean *the Jews*, are also *Vouchers* for the Antiquity and Authority of the *Old Testament*, on which so many of our Arguments depend; and those Arguments of such Validity, that as *Mr. Addison* well concluded, many who now dispute against the Application of its *Prophecies* to *Christ*, would no Doubt have concluded them a *Christian Forgery*, and have argued that Conclusion from the Perspicuity of those *Prophecies*, had not *Providence* laid in so incontestable a Proof to the contrary. *The Wrath of Man, Oh Lord, shall praise thee; and the Remainder of that Wrath shalt thou restrain.* I must on the same Principle congratulate the Happiness of our own Country, in which such *Liberty* is allowed, of proposing whatever can be said against *Christianity*; in Consequence of which our *modern Infidels* are deprived of that shrewd Pre-
tence,

56 *The Rational Arguments for Christianity*

tence, which perhaps might be more serviceable to them than all the rest of their Weapons, that they *could say something* convincing against it, if *penal Laws* did not deter them.

I hope, Sir, these Things will evince, that the *common People* may have some considerable Degrees of *Evidence for those Facts*, on which the *External Proofs of Christianity* are built, tho' they are not capable of consulting the *Original Records* from whence they are taken. But I must not dismiss the Subject, till I have considered an *Objection*, which equally concerns the most *learned Christian*: I mean, that none of the most *rational Arguments*, in their clearest and strongest View, can give the *Mind Satisfaction*;—or at least can produce such a *Degree of Persuasion*, as should animate us to *subdue our Passions*,—or to *endure those Extremities* in Defence of our *Religion*, which we may possibly meet with, and which it indispensably requires us to bear.

You make these *Three distinct Topicks*; but the *former* is so evidently included in the *Two latter*, that all I shall say to it at present is, that every *Man* who will reflect on his own *Mind*, must find, that there are *Degrees of rational Proof* in which he acquiesces with *entire Satisfaction*. Many *Christians* testify this to be the Case, with Regard to the *Arguments in Favour of Christianity*, of which great Number I must declare myself one; and any one who finds himself *dissatisfied*, will do well to give *his Reasons* for that Dissatisfaction, without making his own Case a Standard, by which to pronounce on that of every one else. You argue, as if there were *no Medium* between an *implicite Faith*, and perpetual *Scepticism*; but the Conclusion is very hastily drawn. You, Sir, may perhaps have *known some*, who have gradually *quitted all religious Principles*, when they had begun to *examine any*; I, on the

the contrary, have *known many*, who have professed themselves to have been greatly *confirmed in Christianity* by such *Examination*: They have found its *Evidences*, like *Gold*, approved by the severest Trials; and it is to me utterly unimaginable, how a *rational Believer* should be *incapable* of finding *Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind*, in having used his *rational Faculties* on so important an Occasion.

Waving therefore all farther Debate upon this, I shall proceed to what you add under the Two remaining Parts of this Argument; (*pag. 30, — 35.*) in which you undertake to shew, that “no Conviction drawn from Reasoning can ever have Force enough to command our Passions, so as on common Emergencies” (they are your own extraordinary Words) “to make a good Christian,—much less will it serve to produce a faithful Martyr, if ever so severe an Exercise be demanded at our Hands.” You employ a great Deal of Rhetorick on this Subject, in the Pages referred to above: But I am sorry to say, that, so far as I can judge, it amounts only to this, “That you apprehend something so extremely desirable in the Indulgencies which Christianity prohibits, and something so terrible in Death, in whatever View and Cause it is to be encountered, that no rational Argument imaginable can induce a Man to give up the one, and expose himself to the other.”

And is it possible, Sir, that *Sensual Pleasure*, and *Mortal Life* purchased at the Expence of Honour, Gratitude, and Conscience, can indeed appear so exceeding valuable? I would not wrong your moral Character so much, as to suppose, that you seriously meant this, and will abide by it; and yet it is difficult to imagine, how it could be written otherwise than seriously, without bearing hard on another Part of moral Character too. But I will leave

58 *They are adapted to subdue the Passions,*

it among the other *Mysteries* of your Book, and content myself with hinting at *those Reasons*, for which the Matter appears to me in a quite contrary View; as I am persuaded, it would have done to *Socrates*, *Seneca*, or *Epictetus*, had they considered it only in *Theory*.

No Paradox in Human Nature appears to me so strange, as that a Man, who in his Conscience *believes*, that the *Arguments in Favour of Christianity* are unanswerably strong, should deliberately allow himself in the *Violation of its Precepts*; or should, by any Temporal Considerations whatsoever, be induced to *renounce it*. All the Pleas of Duty, Gratitude, and Interest, are so weighty, in Favour of a constant and resolute Subjection to it, that one could hardly imagine, did not Fact demonstrate the contrary, that *any Temptation* of Allurement, or of Terror, should, with a *rational Creature*, who believed the *Gospel*, triumph over them.

Nor is a Life of *Christian Obedience* that violent and constrained Thing, which you seem to suppose. Were I to judge by these Pages alone, I should imagine you had never read the *New Testament*, and did not know how the *Views of a Christian* are animated and raised. Oh Sir, the *rational Believer* is in his Heart and Conscience *persuaded*, that, to all the Bounties of his *Common Providence*, God has added the Riches of *Redeeming Love*. He is fully persuaded, that the *Son of GOD* descended from Heaven, to deliver him from everlasting Ruin; that he has generously *purchased him* with the Price of *his own Blood*; and that (if he be conscious of a true Faith in him,) *Christ* has taken him *as his peculiar Property* under his guardian Care, with a gracious Purpose of conducting him safely thro' Life and Death, of receiving his nobler Part in a very little Time into the Abode of holy and happy Spirits, and at length of raising his Body
from

from the Dust, and fixing his compleat Person in a State of immortal Glory and Felicity. Now when this is *really believed*, and the Conviction is firm and lively, (which I hope, *a rational Conviction* may very possibly be,) what can be a more *natural Effect*, than that an ardent *Love* to *GOD our Father*, and to the *Lord Jesus Christ*, should be excited by it? And it is easy to imagine, that *this Love* must make *Obedience* easy: And when the Mind is taken up with such *sublime* and *delightful Views*, and those *devotional Exercises* which it is so natural to ingraft upon them, it will not be so hard a Matter as many seem to imagine, to conquer the irregular Propensities of animal Nature, or the *Exorbitancies of Passion*, where only the little Enjoyments and Interests of this transitory Life are concerned. Or rather, many of *those Exorbitancies* will be *superfeded*, or, as the *Apostle* justly and finely expresses it, *crucified by the Cross of Christ*; and the Affections without any painful Struggle will generally flow on in an orderly and pleasant Channel.

And where this is the Temper and Character, *Martyrdom* may not appear *so dreadful a Thing*, as you, Sir, have taken Pains to represent it. It may rather be the habitual Judgment of such a *Christian*, that it is to be esteemed an *Honour* and *Favour*, which our great *Lord* bestows on some of his most beloved Servants. To be excused from the melancholy Circumstances attending *Death* in its Natural Form; to have an Opportunity of turning the common Lot of Mortality into an Occasion of manifesting Heroick Gratitude and Fidelity to the best of Masters and of Friends; *to die* with those warm Sentiments and elevated Views which such a Condition so naturally tends to excite and suggest, would not surely be, as you seem to insinuate, *the Death of a Fool*; (which I cannot think even that

60 *Facts of this Kind shew the Gospel is true.*

of *Socrates* to have been :) Surely, Sir, on Second Thoughts you must rather judge it a Consummation of the Labours, Cares, and Sorrows inseparable from Human Life, to be devoutly *wished for*, rather than *dreaded*. I will on the other Hand grant, that hellish Acts of *Cruelty* may be invented and practised, under which the *Resolution* of an Upright Mind may faint, and even *Reason* itself be overborne, unless God were pleased to interpose by *extraordinary Supports*, which there is great Encouragement to hope he would in such a Case do: But while *Reason* remains undisturbed, I should imagine, that *Death* in its most horrible Form, when met in the Cause of such a *Saviour* who had so graciously borne it for us, should appear *more desirable* than *Life* in its most agreeable Circumstances; and surely then, infinitely more desirable than *Life* purchased by base Ingratitude to him, and worn out under the Sense of his just Displeasure, and the sad Prospect of being finally disowned by him, as an *Apostate* and a *Traitor*.

This, I think, to be solid *Reason*; and I bless God, there are numberless *Facts* which confirm it, and shew, that Persons not pretending to any such *immediate Revelation* as you assert to be necessary, have conquered the greatest Difficulties on these Principles, and, after having *adorned the Gospel* by a most exemplary and holy *Life*, have steadily and chearfully *sealed it* with their *Blood*. And every Fact of this Kind is so unanswerable an Argument against all that you alledge here, that I do not judge it necessary to pursue this Part of my Reply any farther.

With this therefore I conclude what I had to offer in Vindication of the *Perspicuity* and *Solidity* of those *Arguments in Proof of Christianity*, to which the *Generality of its Professors* among us *may attain*:

And

And I hope it will be allowed, that I have fairly and candidly, as well as seriously, considered what you *object against it*, and so have answered the *First Part* of your Pamphlet, which I take to be by far the most plausible and dangerous.

Your Endeavour to prove, that *Christianity* itself avows, that it *is not built upon Argument*, but on a *Revelation* to be immediately made from the *Spirit of GOD* to every *Christian*, by which *all Argument* is superseded, and *all Possibility of Doubt and Error* excluded, is such a direct *Contradiction* to the whole Tenour of the *New Testament*, that I hardly think you would be understood *seriously to mean it*. It is sufficient, that you have shewn, you have Wit enough to give a Varnish to so wild a Notion. Yet lest any should be so weak, as to imagine there is any *Solidity* in what you have so adventurously advanced on that Head, I am willing plainly to discuss it with you; and at the same Time to enquire into what you say, with Regard to the *Awful Sentence* which the *Gospel* passes on those who *reject it*: A Circumstance, which you every where represent as utterly *irreconcilable* with a *Religion* to be *rationally proved* and *defended*; but which on the contrary appears to me *most wisely adapted* to the rest of the *Scheme*, and, when compared with it, an *Addition* rather than *Abatement* of its *Internal Evidence*. This, and several other Particulars in yours, I should be glad to examine; but I wave it at present, because this Letter is already swelled to a pretty large Size. I therefore reserve what I have farther to say to another Opportunity, and I hope a few Weeks more may afford it. But I chuse to send you what I have already written, without any farther Delay; because I am conscious of the many Hindrances, which, in a Life like mine, oblige me often to postpone, much longer than I intended, the

the Execution of Attempts to do what little I can towards serving the World, by promoting the *Interest of Christianity* in it; and because I really think your Piece has been already too long unanswered. If you please to offer any Thing in Reply to what I have here proposed, I shall give it a serious Consideration; and hope that I shall, in the whole Course of this Controversy, endeavour to write like a *Christian*, and then I shall not forget any other Character which I could wish to maintain. At present, Sir, I conclude with assuring you, that it is with sensible Regret I have found myself obliged, for the *Honour of the Gospel*, and the *Preservation of Mens Souls*, to animadvert on what you have writ, in the Manner I have already done. Should you prove, which may possibly be the Case, some *old Acquaintance* and *Friend*, I hope I have writ nothing which should make me blush at any Interview with you; and should you, as I rather apprehend, be an *entire Stranger*, I am, on the common Principles of *that Faith*, which it is the great Glory of my Life to profess and defend, with sincere good Wishes for your Temporal and Eternal Happiness, in any Thing which may conduce to either,

S I R,

Your obedient humble Servant,

Northampton,
Nov. 5, 1742.

P. DODDRIDGE.



Published by the same AUTHOR.

I. **T**HE FAMILY EXPOSITOR: Or, a Paraphrase and Version of the Four Evangelists, disposed in the Order of an Harmony: With Critical Notes, and a Practical Improvement of each Section. In Two Volumes, 4to.

II. Sermons on the Religious Education of Children. The Second Edition.

III. Free Thoughts on the most probable Means of reviving the Dissenting Interest.

IV. Sermons to Young Persons, on the following Subjects; *viz.* 1. The Importance of the Rising Generation. 2. Christ formed in the Soul the Foundation of Hope. 3. A Dissuasive from keeping Wicked Company. 4. The Young Christian invited to an early Attendance on the Lord's-Table. 5. The Orphan's Hope. 6. The Reflections of a Pious Parent on the Death of a Wicked Child. 7. Youth reminded of approaching Judgment. The Second Edition.

V. The Care of the Soul urged as the One Thing needful; a Sermon preached *June 22, 1735.* The Third Edition.

VI. The Absurdity and Iniquity of Persecution for Conscience sake, in all its Kinds and Degrees; a Sermon preached at *Northampton.*

VII. Ten Sermons on the Power and Grace of Christ, and on the Evidences of his glorious Gospel; preached at *Northampton.* The Second Edition.

VIII. Submission to Divine Providence in the Death of Children, recommended and enforced, in a Sermon preached at *Northampton*, on the Death of a very amiable and hopeful Child about Five Years old. The Second Edition.

IX. The

Published by the same AUTHOR.

IX. The Temper and Conduct of the Primitive Ministers of the Gospel illustrated and recommended, in a Sermon preached at *Wisbeach*, June 8, 1737. at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. *William Johnston*.

X. Practical Reflections on the Character and Translation of *Enoch*; in a Sermon preached at *Welford*, March 9, 1737-8. on the Death of the Reverend Mr. *John Norris*.

XI. A Sermon preached at *Wellingborough*, Nov. 9, 1738. which was observed as a Day of Fasting and Prayer, on Account of the late dreadful Fire there. With an Hymn proper to the Occasion.

XII. The Necessity of a General Reformation, in order to a well-grounded Hope of Success in War; represented in a Sermon preached at *Northampton*, on the General Fast, Jan. 9, 1739-40.

XIII. The Scripture-Doctrine of Salvation by Grace through Faith, illustrated and improved in Two Sermons, preached at *Rowell*.

XIV. Practical Discourses on Regeneration, in Ten Sermons, preached at *Northampton*, on the following Subjects; 1. The Character of the Unregenerate. 2, 3. The Nature of Regeneration. 4, 5, 6. The Necessity and Importance of it. 7. The Divine Influences necessary to produce it. 8. The various Methods in which those Influences operate. 9. Directions to the awakened Sinner. 10. An Address to the Regenerate.

XV. The Evil and Danger of neglecting the Souls of Men, plainly and seriously represented in a Sermon preached at a Meeting of Ministers at *Kettering* in *Northamptonshire*, October 15, 1741, and published at their Request.